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A LETTER
FROM THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE
✓ PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
IN THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,
TO THE
CHURCHES UNDER THEIR CARE;
ACCOMPANIED WITH A PLAN ADOPTED BY THE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT
OF A
THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL,
INTENDED TO INCREASE
THE PIETY AND LEARNING,
OF CANDIDATES FOR THE HOLY MINISTRY,
AS WELL AS TO PROCURE
A LARGER SUPPLY OF MINISTERS
FOR THE
WANTS OF THE CHURCHES.

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THE LETTER
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian church in the United States of America, to the churches under their care.

Dear Brethren,

Among the various objects which have engaged our attention in the course of our present sessions, one of the most important is, the plan of a Theological Seminary, proposed to be established, in some convenient spot within the bounds of our church. This plan, so far as it has been matured, accompanies the present address, and solicits your serious consideration.

We trust, dear brethren, it is not necessary to employ much argument to convince you, that the time has arrived, in which some new and vigorous exertions are indispensable for increasing the number, and raising the qualifications, of candidates for the gospel ministry in our church.—When you are reminded, that the progress of population is going on in our country in a ratio at least three or four times greater, than the increase of the number of ministers;—when you are apprized, that we have near **FOUR HUNDRED VACANT CONGREGATIONS** within our bounds; that the frontier settlements, as well as many large and important districts in the interior of our country, are, every year, calling upon us for missionary labours, which we are not able to supply; and that there is no prospect that any means of relief yet devised, will be sufficient to preserve many parts of the church from a most distressing famine of the word of life; we trust you will perceive the absolute necessity of using our utmost exertions for sending forth more labourers into so great a harvest.

We feel persuaded, that, if the plan which we have adopted can be carried into vigorous execution, it will tend, under the divine blessing, to *increase the number* of candidates for the holy ministry. If we are enabled, by the possession of suitable funds,

not only to afford a more complete and ample course of instruction in theology than has been, heretofore, in ordinary cases, attainable ; but also to afford this instruction *gratuitously*, to those who are themselves destitute of adequate pecuniary resources; we cherish the hope that these facilities will be the means of drawing into public view many ingenious and pious youth, who are at present, either discouraged from making the attempt to gain an education for the ministry, or not properly awakened to the loud and importunate demands of the church.

But further ; such a seminary as that which is now proposed is not less calculated to *improve the education*, than to increase the number, of candidates for the sacred office.—Without some provision of this kind, it is, in most cases, utterly impossible to bring forward candidates for the ministry with that furniture and those qualifications for their work, which the state of society now renders in a great measure indispensable to their respectability and usefulness. It is to be hoped that we shall never cease to consider vital and experimental religion as the first and most indispensable qualification in every candidate for the holy ministry. All attainments without this, would unquestionably be, not only inadequate, but pernicious. Yet it must also be admitted that piety alone cannot qualify a man to be a teacher of the gospel; especially in circumstances where the literary and scientific attainments of many avowed infidels, and the general improvement of almost all descriptions of people, will render it impossible for the religious teacher to maintain weight of character, and permanent influence, if his knowledge be scanty, and his literature circumscribed.—The minister himself, in such a situation, will feel, and be disconcerted by, a sense of his inferiority, and will neither speak with confidence in himself, nor in such a manner as to beget and preserve confidence in the minds of others.

Influenced by these considerations, it has been the universal custom of the Protestant churches in Europe, and of none more than of that church from which we derive our origin, to encourage a learned and pious ministry, and to institute schools for the purpose. These schools, particularly in *Scotland and Holland*, have been cherished, with the greatest care, ever since the time of the glorious reformation, and have been attended with the happiest consequences ; nor would it be difficult to prove that they have had a most important efficacy in preserving the influence of evangelical truth in those countries. Churches in this country derived from those of Scotland and Holland, and still more recently, our congregational brethren in Massachusetts have undertaken similar institutions, and have already begun to reap fruits of the most promising kind. Unless we imitate their laudable example, the consequences will probably be, that, in a few years, while they

rise and flourish, we shall decline, and fall into a state of discouraging weakness and inferiority.

Impressed with these convictions, and placed in these solemn circumstances, the Assembly have resolved, in the name, and, as they trust, with an humble reliance on the aid of the great king of Zion, to go forward, and attempt the execution of the plan which will be herewith submitted to your consideration.—They have preferred the establishment of a single school, to the erection of a greater number, because, after comparing the reports from the several Presbyteries, and the sentiments of commissioners to the Assembly from the various parts of the church, there appeared every reason to believe that the former plan would be most acceptable and most generally approved; and also because they are of opinion, that this plan, by concentrating the strength and resources of the whole church, will furnish a more complete system of education, and tend more than any other, to promote the purity, peace, harmony, and vigour of the Presbyterian body in the United States.

And now, dear brethren, it depends, under God, on your patronage and liberality, whether the plan proposed shall be carried into execution, and if executed at all, whether with languor, and comparative inutility, or with vigour and effect.—To support several Professors; to provide an adequate library; and to furnish the means of giving gratuitous instruction and boarding to a large number of poor and pious youth, will require large funds. For obtaining these, we have no human dependence but your liberality. And accordingly to solicit contributions in different portions of the church, we have appointed agents, who are directed to report the result of their solicitations to the next General Assembly.

We call upon you, christian brethren, as the professed disciples of Christ, to consider the important crisis, and the momentous object which are now brought to your view.—You acknowledge that you are not your own, but that you are bought with a price, and are bound to glorify God in your bodies and spirits which are his.—If it be so, *your silver and your gold are the Lord's*; and you are under obligations to employ them in such a manner as will most effectually promote the glory of Him, by whose bounty they were given you.—With this great principle in view, consider the pressing calls of large and flourishing churches, who solicit in vain for ministers to break to them the bread of life. Consider the loud and affecting cries of many destitute settlements, which know nothing of those precious privileges with which you are surrounded. Consider the honour of the church, with which you are connected; the interests of religion for which you profess to feel; the infinite value of immortal souls, who are perishing for lack of knowledge; the authority of that God who commands you to com-

passionate them; and the guilt which you will contract if the health of the church should languish, or souls perish, by your negligence or parsimony. Consider these things; and then say whether you can consent to withhold a portion of your substance, when called upon to aid in one of the most important concerns ever presented to your consideration.

Brethren, we leave this subject for your solemn and prayerful deliberation.—Praying that He who has the hearts of all flesh in his hands, may dispose you to do that which is well pleasing in his sight, and honourable to your christian profession;—and that grace, mercy and peace may be multiplied unto you, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, we are in the bonds of the Gospel, your friends and brethren.

Signed by order of the Assembly.

JOHN B. ROMEYN, Moderator.

THE PLAN
OF THE
THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL, &c.

The Presbyteries were called upon to state what they had respectively done with respect to the recommendation of the last Assembly, relative to the establishment of a Theological school.

The committee appointed to present to the Assembly a plan for the establishment of a Theological school, reported, and the report was laid on the table.

The Committee appointed farther to consider the subject of Theological schools, reported, and the report, being read and amended, was adopted, and is as follows, viz.

That after maturely deliberating on the subject committed to them, they submit to the Assembly the following results.

1. It is evident, that not only a majority of the Presbyteries which have reported on this subject, but also a majority of all the Presbyteries, under the care of this Assembly, have expressed a decided opinion in favour of the establishment of a Theological school or schools in our church.

2. It appears to the committee, that although, according to the statement already reported to the Assembly, there is an equal number of Presbyteries in favour of the first plan, which contemplates a single school for the whole church; and in favour of the third plan, which contemplates the erection of a school in each Synod; yet, as several of the objections made to the first plan, are founded entirely on mis-conception, and will be completely obviated by developing the details of that plan; it seems fairly to follow, that there is a greater amount of Presbyterial suffrage in favour of a single school, than of any other plan.

3. Under these circumstances, the committee are of opinion, that as much light has been obtained from the reports of Presbyteries, on this subject, as would be likely to result from a renewal of the reference; that no advantage will probably arise from farther delay in this important concern, but, on the contrary, much re-

rious inconvenience and evil; that the present Assembly is bound to attempt to carry into execution some one of the plans proposed; and that the first plan, appearing to have, on the whole, the greatest share of public sentiment in its favour, ought of course to be adopted.

4. Your committee therefore recommend, that the present General Assembly declare its approbation and adoption of this plan, and immediately commence a course of measures for carrying it into execution, as promptly and extensively as possible; and for this purpose, they recommend to the Assembly, the adoption of the following resolutions.

Resolved,

1. That the state of our churches, the loud and affecting calls of destitute frontier settlements, and the laudable exertions of various christian denominations around us; all demand that the collected wisdom, piety and zeal of the Presbyterian church be, without delay, called into action, for furnishing the church with a large supply of able and faithful ministers.

2. That the General Assembly will, in the name of the Great Head of the church, immediately attempt to establish a seminary for securing to candidates for the ministry more extensive and efficient theological instruction, than they have heretofore enjoyed. The local situation of this seminary is hereafter to be determined

3. That, in this seminary, when completely organized, there shall be, at least, three professors; who shall be elected by, and hold their offices during, the pleasure of the General Assembly, and who shall give a regular course of instruction in divinity, oriental and biblical literature, and in ecclesiastical history and church government, and on such other subjects as may be deemed necessary. It being, however, understood that, until sufficient funds can be obtained for the complete organization, and support of the proposed seminary, a smaller number of professors than three may be appointed to commence the system of instruction.

4. That exertions be made to provide such an amount of funds for this seminary as will enable its conductors to afford gratuitous instruction, and, where it is necessary, gratuitous support, to all such students as may not themselves possess adequate pecuniary means.

5. That the Rev. Drs. Green, Woodhull, Miller and Romeyn, the Rev. Messrs. Archibald Alexander, James Richards, and Amzi Armstrong be a committee to digest and prepare a plan of a theological seminary; embracing in detail the fundamental principles of the Institution, together with regulations for guiding the conduct of the instructors and the students; and prescribing

the best mode of visiting, and of controlling and supporting the whole system. This plan is to be reported to the next General Assembly.

6. That the Rev. Messrs. Jedediah Chapman, Jonas Coe, William Morrison, James Carnahan, and Mr. Isaac Hutton, of the Synod of Albany:—the Rev. Drs. Samuel Miller, Phillip Milledoler, John B. Romeyn, and Aaron Woolworth, the Rev. Messrs. James Richards, David Comfort, and Isaac Vandoren, and Col. Henry Rutgers, of the Synod of New-York and New-Jersey: the Rev. Drs. Ashbel Green, John M'Knight, and James Muir, the Rev. Messrs. Nathaniel Irwin, John Glendy, Archibald Alexander, John E. Latta, John B. Slemons, John B. Patterson, and James Inglis, and Mr. Robert Ralston, of the Synod of Philadelphia:—the Rev. John D. Blair, William Williamson, Samuel Houston, Samuel Doake, and Benjamin Grigsby, of the Synod of Virginia:—the Rev. Samuel Ralston, James Guthrie, William Speer, and James Hughes, of the Synod of Pittsburgh: the Rev. Robert G. Wilson, James Blythe, Archibald Cameron, and Joshua L. Wilson, of the Synod of Kentucky:—the Rev. Drs. James Hall, and Henry Kollock, and the Rev. Messrs. Malcham M'Neir, James M'Ihenny, and Andrew Flinn, of the Synod of the Carolinas; be, and they hereby are, appointed agents, to solicit donations in the course of the current year, within the bounds of their respective Synods, for the establishment and support of the proposed seminary; and if any of said agents should be unable or unwilling to act in this case, it will be his or their duty to inform the Moderator of his or their Synod, for the time being, who is hereby authorized, if he think proper, to appoint a substitute or substitutes, as the case may require. These agents are to report to the next General Assembly.

Resolved, That the members of this Assembly generally, and all the clergy of our denomination within our bounds, do aid the exertions of those who shall go on this business.

7. That, as filling the church with a learned and able ministry without a corresponding portion of real piety, would be a curse to the world, and an offence to God and his people; so the General Assembly think it their duty to state, that in establishing a seminary for training up ministers, it is their earnest desire to guard, as far as possible, against so great an evil. And they do hereby solemnly pledge themselves to the churches under their care, that, in forming and carrying into execution the plan of the proposed seminary, it will be their endeavour to make it, under the blessing of God, a *nursery of vital piety*, as well as of sound theological learning, and to train up persons for the ministry, who shall be lovers, as well as defenders, of the truth as it is in Jesus, friends of revivals of religion, and a blessing to the church of God.

8. That as the constitution of our church guarantees to every Presbytery the right of judging of its own candidates for licensure and ordination; so the Assembly think it proper to state, most explicitly, that every Presbytery and Synod will, of course, be left, at full liberty, to countenance the proposed plan or not, at pleasure; and to send their students to the projected seminary or keep them, as heretofore, within their own bounds, as they may think most conducive to the prosperity of the church.

9. That the professors in the seminary shall not, in any case, be considered as having a right to license candidates to preach the gospel, but that all such candidates shall be remitted to their respective Presbyteries to be licensed as heretofore.

10. Resolved, finally, that Dr. Samuel Miller and Rev. James Richards be a committee, to prepare a draught of an address from this Assembly to the churches under our care; calling their attention to the subject of a Theological School, and earnestly soliciting their patronage and support, in the execution of the plan now proposed.

Certified by

JACOB J. JANEWAY, Stated Clerk.











